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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001943

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [UNGA](#) [MARR](#) [KNNP](#) [LY](#) [KN](#) [IR](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: FOREIGN SECRETARY ROMULO ON U.S.-ASEAN SUMMIT,
VFA, NONPROLIFERATION TREATY, UNGA

REF: A. A) MANILA 1843
[1](#)B. B) EAP/MTS-EMBASSY MANILA EMAIL
[1](#)C. C) STATE 95073
[1](#)D. D) STATE 82701

MANILA 00001943 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a private September 14 breakfast meeting with the Ambassador, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo pushed for the next U.S.-ASEAN Summit to be held in the United States, and said that a prominent Filipino Senate critic would soon raise the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) again. Romulo confirmed President Arroyo would not attend the UN General Assembly, citing a busy travel schedule, and said the Philippines was fully committed to voting for the Egyptian candidate to lead UNESCO. The Foreign Secretary said he wanted to engage in detail with senior U.S. officials on Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) issues, while the Ambassador stressed the importance of Iran and North Korea as ongoing U.S. nonproliferation concerns. Romulo said signing a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact was a Philippine priority and one of the issues he would like to discuss with Secretary Clinton and others during a proposed visit to Washington. Commenting on Palace atmospherics, the Foreign Secretary said while President Arroyo was increasingly frustrated with being considered a lame duck, she is resigned to the fact that her presidency would end next summer. END SUMMARY.

URGING U.S. VENUE FOR ASEAN SUMMIT

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador previewed for Secretary Romulo A/S Campbell's letter proposing that the U.S.-ASEAN Summit be held during the upcoming APEC summit in Singapore (ref B). Romulo was impassioned in his reply, arguing that the Summit was a critical event in the process of U.S. re-engagement with ASEAN and that making the event a subset of APEC would send the wrong message. Holding the Summit in Singapore would present problems for the non-APEC members of ASEAN, like Burma, Romulo asserted. It was the U.S. turn to host and Washington, Chicago, and Honolulu were all good options in his view. The Ambassador noted the logistical value of holding the U.S.-ASEAN Summit in Singapore and said that holding it in the region showed the commitment to Asia.

ANTI-VFA SENATOR WAITING TO POUNCE

[1](#)3. (C) Romulo said that Senator Miriam Santiago, head of the

Senate Foreign Relations Committee and currently the most vociferous critic of our bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement, was having trouble getting cosponsors for her draft resolution calling on the Arroyo administration to renegotiate the VFA (ref A). However, she was likely to deliver a speech in the Senate as soon as September 16 that would bring negative press attention to the U.S.-Philippine agreement. The Foreign Secretary posited that Santiago was only seeking to score political points and that her actions should be viewed in the context of the May 2010 elections. He said that he remained a strong supporter of our military-to-military relationship, but that we should take steps to reduce somewhat the public profile of our joint military activities until after the election.

PERIPATETIC PRESIDENT SKIPPING UNGA

14. (C) The Ambassador expressed surprise that President Arroyo had suddenly canceled her planned participation in the UN General Assembly, particularly given the Philippine government's key role as chair of the NPT Review Conference and interest in other key issues, including human rights. Romulo confirmed that President Arroyo would not attend UNGA, contending she did not want to be out of the country for an extended period of time. Her upcoming trip to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UK. would take at least a week, and adding New York to the itinerary would mean five additional days of travel.

DETAILED COOPERATION ON NPT REVCON

15. (C) Secretary Romulo said that he would lead the

MANILA 00001943 002.2 OF 002

Philippine delegation to UNGA and planned to attend the Security Council Summit. He was putting a good deal of energy into NPT issues and looked forward to his working dinner with U.S. Special Representative Burk, whom he hopes would provide a month-by-month plan regarding U.S. goals in the lead-up to the NPT Review Conference. The Ambassador said that the Review Conference was particularly important in light of Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs, and reviewed for the Foreign Secretary our continued concerns regarding the two countries' nuclear ambitions (ref C). Regarding North Korea, the Ambassador noted that our proposed bilateral meetings would take place within the context of the Six-Party Talks.

OIC CANDIDACY OVERSHADOWS POLICY

16. (C) The Ambassador stressed our views on the upcoming election for UNESCO Secretary General, noting the strong field of qualified candidates and our concerns regarding the Egyptian candidate (ref D). Romulo said that the Philippines was "100 percent committed" to the Egyptian candidate based on Cairo's support for the Philippines' crucial candidacy for observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Romulo said that the OIC issue also lay behind President Arroyo's recent visit to Libya. The Ambassador said that the timing of Arroyo's recent was unfortunate, coming so soon after the international uproar over Libya's warm welcome for the released Lockerbie bomber. Romulo replied that the trip was planned long ago and was not related to Lockerbie, but rather to the need to maintain Libya's support for the Philippines' OIC candidacy.

VITAL IMPORTANCE OF MCC COMPACT

17. (C) Romulo reiterated the importance to the Philippines of signing an MCC compact and said that, along with the NPT and North Korea, it was one of the key issues that he would like to discuss with Secretary Clinton and others during a

proposed visit to Washington in October, or in a bilateral meeting with the Secretary at APEC in November. The Ambassador said that with the technical plans for an MCC compact going well, the key was for the Philippines to show progress on the indicators -- particularly corruption. A great deal of work had gone into developing a compact proposal, she continued, and we all hoped that a compact could be signed. Washington has seen many negative press reports on issues related to the indicators, so it is incumbent upon the Philippines to make the best possible case.

LAME DUCK STATUS FRUSTRATES ARROYO

18. (C) Commenting on Malacanang Palace atmospherics and domestic politics, the Foreign Secretary said that with more than nine months left until she leaves office, President Arroyo had become increasingly frustrated with those who considered her a lame duck. Nevertheless, he said that she was resigned to the fact that her presidency would end next summer.
KENNEY